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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS ROUNDTABLE: EMBASSY

BISHKEK'S POINTS

REF: STATE 125456

11. (U) SUMMARY: The Embassy has actively supported Kyrgyzstan's burgeoning democracy, and has taken great strides to promote human rights and civil liberties through direct, public engagement with government officials and civil society, NGOs, and religious groups. U.S.-funded projects have also benefited these efforts, with local and international partners working to advance human rights activities throughout the country. While the level of government cooperation has fluctuated, Kyrgyzstan continues to recognize the importance of adhering to democratic principles. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Following a series of public uprisings, starting with the March 2005 "revolution" that brought President Bakiyev to power, the Kyrgyz Government's (GOKG) respect for democracy and human rights improved in several areas. These include freedom of assembly, fewer incidents of military hazing, improved prison conditions, some accountability for abuses by law enforcement officials, and modest anticorruption efforts. Relations with the opposition and civil society activists have also improved slightly, with a decrease in reprisals for anti-government actions.

13. (U) Despite these improvements, however, serious problems remain. Members of the security forces at times tortured or abused persons, often with impunity. Arbitrary or unlawful killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, and the disappearance of and failure to protect refugee and asylum seekers continue to be problematic. Prison conditions remain very poor, contributing to prison riots and attempted suicides. Restrictions on citizens' rights to change their government persist, but are less severe than in previous years. A lack of judicial independence amid pervasive corruption also remains a serious problem, limiting citizens' rights to due process. Additionally, trafficking in persons, violence against women and children, child labor, and discrimination against ethnic minorities are also concerns.

14. (U) The U.S strategy to promote democracy and human rights focuses on strengthening democratic institutions, including constitutional reform, increasing observance of human rights, combating corruption, supporting civil society, and promoting independent media. The United States maintains close contact with independent journalists, human rights activists, religious clerics, and politicians from across the political spectrum, while encouraging dialogue between the government and civil society. The Ambassador and visiting senior U.S. officials, including Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher, met frequently with members of the government, civil society and

human rights groups to encourage reform. The Embassy has also hosted a series of roundtables with journalists, students, and civil society activists in several regions of the country to discuss the need for further reform. In addition, the Ambassador implemented an active public diplomacy program to help build support for reform.

15. (U) Promoting media freedom and freedom of speech remains a top priority. In bilateral and multilateral meetings, U.S. officials regularly encourage the government to bring its media laws in line with international standards, in particular by rescinding criminal penalties for libel and transforming state-owned television into an independent entity. President Bakiyev signed legislation allowing for the creation of an independent board for state television. In April, state security services confiscated the print runs of two opposition newspapers during a raid on an independent printing press. The Kyrgyz government acted to remedy the situation: the newspapers were allowed to resume operations, the prime minister publicly apologized for the raid, and the prime minister attended a press freedom event that the embassy organized at the printing press. The United States continues to provide training to journalists from electronic and print outlets in an effort to improve professional standards and clarify the legal framework for media operation. Kyrgyz media professionals have also been sent to the U.S. to learn about the role of the media in a democratic society. The United States continues its support of the Media Support Center, which is the only independent printing press in the country and Central Asia. The first independent Central Asian news syndicate was launched with U.S. funds. U.S.-funded projects increased the professionalism of women journalists and coverage of women's issues and human rights.

16. (U) The Ambassador and other U.S. officials regularly encourage the government to curb and publicly denounce NGO harassment. When an NGO leader was assaulted in 2006 by

unknown assailants and sustained head injuries, the Ambassador visited him in hospital and pressed the government to conduct an independent investigation, hold the perpetrators accountable, and ensure the leader's safety. The United States continues its strong support for a wide variety of programs designed to strengthen civil society and advocacy through a network of nine support centers that provide training, grants, legal assistance and other services to NGOs throughout the country. These centers are joined into the countrywide Association of Civil Society Support Centers that advocates at the national level on civil society issues.

17. (U) The United States and the European Union jointly and successfully pressed the government to exercise restraint and respect freedom of assembly during the numerous rallies and protests throughout the year which, by and large, took place peacefully. A U.S. grant enabled a local foundation to monitor respect for freedom of assembly with the goal of supporting citizen activism and increasing awareness of democracy and human rights.

18. (U) The United States continues to support legal and judicial reform, transparency, and provides strong diplomatic support to anticorruption efforts. The Millennium Challenge Corporation Board has approved a Threshold Country Program for Kyrgyzstan targeting reforms in the judiciary, the procuracy, and law enforcement. If implemented successfully, the program, which includes elements of oversight by civil society, will bring about a marked improvement in the respect for human rights. The U.S. also supports the human rights defenders' network which monitors prisons and pretrial detention facilities in an effort to prevent detainee abuse. The network also reports on human rights abuses around the country and works with authorities at the local and national levels to prevent further abuses. The United States provided a series of 28 small grants to local NGOs to protect human rights, provide civic education, foster the rule of law and promote the use of conflict prevention and resolution techniques.

¶9. (U) In 2006 the United States urged the GOKG to turn over to UNHCR for third-country resettlement four Uzbek refugees and one Uzbek asylum seeker who remained in detention after having fled the 2005 violence in Andijon. Following continuous advocacy efforts by U.S. authorities in both Bishkek and Washington, the Secretary sent a letter to President Bakiyev reiterating the U.S. position. Despite U.S. recommendations, however, the GOKG forcibly returned these individuals to Uzbekistan. The United States publicly denounced this in Bishkek, Washington, and at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. U.S. officials also called on the GOKG to conduct an impartial investigation into the disappearance of other Uzbek asylum and refugee seekers.

¶10. (U) To promote religious freedom, the United States maintains regular contact with representatives of various religious communities and has funded several Muslim religious leaders to visit the U.S. through IVLP. In 2006 the Ambassador hosted Iftar dinners for Muslim leaders in Bishkek and Osh, sponsored a roundtable on religious freedom and visited the Islamic University and mosques. The Deputy Chief of Mission addressed a crowd of over 50,000 worshipers in Bishkek's main square on the Feast of Eid, which marks the end of Ramadan. Post intends to hold similar events during this year's Ramadan celebration as well.

¶11. (U) The United States continues to play a leading role in combating human trafficking. On numerous occasions U.S. officials lobbied the GOKG to employ more effective means to combat trafficking. The USG supported a three-year project to combat trafficking in the country, with a particular focus on labor trafficking. The United States also sponsored anti-trafficking campaigns as well as seminars and training sessions aimed at law enforcement officials involved in anti-trafficking efforts.

¶12. (U) The GOKG's self-initiated efforts to promote democracy and human rights remain somewhat limited, due mainly to lack of financial resources. However, the president has made recent steps to seek a cooperative dialogue with NGOs and civil society, as the GOKG implements its three-year, socio-economic focused Country Development Strategy. Reforming the constitution remains a top priority for the government, as Kyrgyzstan strives to achieve a true balance of powers. Reducing penalties for misdemeanor crimes, abolishing capital punishment, and addressing

pre-trial detention issues are also signs of improved attention to human rights. Enabling anti-government demonstrations to occur unhindered is yet another example of Kyrgyzstan's respect for freedom of assembly and civic action. While instances of harassment against opposition groups continue, the Kyrgyz remain committed to promoting and supporting human rights efforts.

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